

West Africa, Paris, and Harlem

Voza Rivers: They arranged for me to go to Paris with Gregory. And so I took the trip, and I was, as they say, blown away by the production. It's a solemn piece. *Tierno Bokar* deals with a man who was a spiritual leader and the . . . and his followers were very, very serious about his philosophy. And to see the actors—a Vietnamese actor, a Japanese actor, African actors from all over—to see them walking so majestically in this solemn environment was just a wonderful theatrical experience. Now mind you, I don't speak French, there are no subtitles, but just being there in the Bouffes du Nord, Peter's theater . . .

One of the fascinating things for me when I went to Paris was to look at the neighborhood that Peter Brook's theater was located in. And as I walked through that neighborhood it reminded me so much of Harlem. So where Peter could have had his theater built in any part of Paris, he chose this very integrated community where the majority population is Indians and Africans.

We consider 116th Street now from Fifth Avenue over to St. Nicholas "Little Africa," and so most of the vendors and stores are owned by West Africans—they all speak French. And we . . . and I'm saying the African-American community and the French comm . . . and the African community, for whatever reasons, we haven't been able to produce a play, a cultural experience, that would bring us closer together. *Tierno Bokar* does that.